

Ed Donaldson: Recognizing and Identifying Causes of Runway Excursions

What I look at as a manager is being engaged in how the operation is run. Basically I'm reviewing all the data that is available because part of the process as we grow as an agency is that data is becoming more readily available. So I've taken it upon myself every day to review the data that came from the operation, whether it's over the weekend or the previous night. Some of the things I'm looking for is the number of go-arounds or any type of anomaly that might affect the safety of that operation and that's my real concern at this point.

So runway excursions, a couple of different things that might cause the aircraft that are too high or too fast on the approach, and with the understanding that typically a flight crew will try to save the operation, because nobody wants to go around. It introduces unacceptable risk into the system when an operation like that occurs. So you want to avoid that as much as possible so again that goes back to the whole premise of keeping an eye on all the data that is available that can tell you what the trends are in that operation. I look back and I review it all to make sure we aren't having a spate of go-arounds...if that's occurring that would indicate to me that we need to look at how the aircraft are being delivered to us as a facility. And then also understanding if there is construction projects going on there at the airport how that's going to affect the operation. And just be aware of those things and plan for them accordingly.

So what you have in Baltimore, my facility as an example, the state aviation administration is in a multi-year project to bring the airport up to current FAA standards. And part of that process is right now we basically run a 3 runway operation. What will happen is one of our main departure runways will close, so that will lead us to running an operation where we will arrive and depart on the same runway. Now fortunately they've had this experience two years ago when that occurred, but it's going to come back around again. We have to be aware that and make sure that we've got everybody on the same page on what that looks like, we

have to open up some of the parameters in the administration of the operation and just really/constantly be aware of what that affect might be.

Some of the factors that I look at that will lead up to runway excursions are how the aircraft are being delivered to us via the final approach control facility. Some of the issues that present themselves there when we split these facilities so you have a standalone tower verses radar approach control facility. You sort of lose that comradery in that ability to work together and function as a unit because now you're two separate facilities. So I'm going to take a look at how those aircraft are being delivered, historically, too high and too fast as they come down for final. And I'm also looking at which way the operation is being conducted in. Normally in an Eastbound operation we will typically have those aircraft being delivered higher and faster because that area where they are being vectored in by the approach control, it compresses up as opposed to when we are in a Westerly operation and those guys have more room to turn them on final. Normally in an Eastbound operation that means we have an Easterly flow of wind, the winds are bringing in the weather that is coming off of the Atlantic, so what you have is more eye far conditions. So those are the type of things that you really have to take a look at and understand how that would affect the operation.

What I would say as an air traffic manager and someone that has been involved in the system for 20+ years, we are in a new phase if you will, as to where we are in the way that we conduct and administer the operation. It used to be, in the gunslinger days, in the late 90s/early 2000s where it was ok to take risks, and what we recognize.... we are much smarter an agency, we recognize that we are introducing unacceptable risk into the system with some of those operations. I'm glad to see that we are maturing as an agency and that we are recognizing the dangers of introducing unacceptable risk into the system. And I'm also happy to see that it's a group effort. No particular entity owns this process completely.... you're talking labor, you're talking management, and we all have to work together and collaborate to make sure that we understand our roles as stewards of this aviation system and make it the safest and keep it the safest in the world.